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Funeral protest legislation clears Senate committee

LANSING – Legislation that would shield funeral guests from the barbs of angry protesters was approved Wednesday by the Senate Committee on Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs, said state Senator Laura M. Toy, committee chair.

“Families have rights too,” said Sen. Toy, whose district includes Garden City, Livonia, Redford Township and Westland. “Families have the right to mourn the loss of their loved one in peace. If protestors want to share their opinions they can do so at a respectful distance.”

Under the bills, protestors would have to stay at least 500 feet away from a funeral service or risk prosecution under the state’s disorderly conduct laws.

The legislation comes in response to a wave of protests at military funerals in the state where groups have hurled insults and threats at the family and friends of fallen soldiers attending their memorial services.

“The brave Michigan men and women of our nation’s armed forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of our freedom deserve better than what they are getting,” Sen. Toy said. “People can have different feelings about the military conflicts our nation is involved in, but desecrating the memory of the dead and trying to inflict more pain on their loved ones who are already suffering is a deplorable way to try to express those feelings.”

Senate Bill 1229, sponsored by Sen. Toy, and four other bills in the package will now go to the full Senate for a vote.

If approved by the Senate, the governor is expected to sign the bills.

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